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SUBJECT: OSCE/PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO OSCE/ODIHR  
FINAL REPORT ON ELECTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

(U) Post is authorized to present the following statement at the Permanent Council meeting in Vienna on December 10.

Begin text:

Madam Chair,

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Lenarcic back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for presenting this final report by the ODIHR Election Support Team for Afghanistan. The report's detailed analysis and thoughtful recommendations make plain why ODIHR truly represents the well-deserved label of the gold standard, in election observation.

We would like to congratulate ODIHR on fully completing its mandate as stipulated in PC Decision 891, well within existing resources, and notwithstanding the sometimes dangerous situations in which EST team members found themselves. The United States once again condemns the cowardice of the Taliban, who claimed responsibility for the October 28 terrorist attack on the UN housing area in Kabul. We again express our condolences to the families of the five UN staff members killed in the attack. We are likewise thankful that the remaining members of the EST escaped injury and that the EST was willing to continue its task should a second round have been necessary in the presidential election.

The United States joins with ODIHR in its sober assessment of the impact of fraud, corruption and violence -- or the threat of violence -- undoubtedly had on the electorate in Afghanistan. Yet we cannot understate the courage of more than five million Afghan citizens, who despite these inhibiting factors and other seemingly insurmountable obstacles, turned out to cast their votes in the first ever Afghan-led elections. Similarly, we would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the thousands of Afghan and international observers and security officials who, sometimes at great personal risk, supported the electoral process and made this election as well as the ODIHR's candid report possible.

The United States concurs with the report's findings that deep and sustained reform is required in Afghanistan to enhance the government's ability and credibility in conducting future elections. We remain committed to partnering with the Afghan people and their government on our shared objectives of strengthening good governance, tackling corruption, increasing economic opportunities, and improving security for all Afghans. We note the calls by the EST for reform of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). We also take note of the report's call for a review of the electoral calendar, consideration of an electoral system that encourages the creation of political parties alongside independent candidates, and the need for a robust, comprehensive voter register. We will study the comprehensive recommendations

set forth in the ODIHR report and will work with our Afghan and international partners on their implementation. We value highly the effective partnership ODIHR has built over the past few years with the IEC and ECC and we look forward to further opportunities ahead to build upon it.

We once again wish to thank you, Ambassador Lenarcic, for your tireless efforts to support respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law throughout the OSCE and in our partner nations. The OSCE's work with the government and people of Afghanistan stands as a testament to the enduring commitment by our region, including neighboring states, to helping Afghanistan on its way toward a secure, prosperous and democratic future.

Thank you, Madam Chair.  
CLINTON